

FINE ART

Suburbanites fuel Orchestra Hall revitalization

BY MATT JACOBSON
STAFF WRITER

Two suburbanites are in the forefront of a Detroit revitalization effort they say will create a cultural mecca for southeastern Michigan.

Developer Peter Cummings, who lives in Bloomfield Hills, and Katherine Beebe, a real estate consultant from Birmingham, are two of the movers behind Orchestra Hall. An \$80 million complex under construction in the area around Orchestra Hall, home of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra.

Orchestra Place will combine office, retail, dining and parking space, a new high school focused on the arts, and an Orchestra Hall expansion that will have amenities for musicians, concertgoers and symphony staff.

The 1997-98 Detroit Symphony Orchestra season will mark the first signs of major physical improvements to Orchestra Hall. By November, the initial phase of the three-phase project will include a 250-seat upscale restaurant and plenty of on-site parking.

"It represents the perfect kind of project for Detroit," said Beebe, a project manager, shortly after Orchestra Place was announced a year ago. "It's kind of the best of Detroit."

Cummings, vice chairman of the DSOH board, said the intent is to bring together cultural, educational and corporate organizations in a way that demonstrates their commitment to Detroit.

Cummings and DSOH executive director Mark Volpe said they sense a yearning for urban life among suburbanites, especially younger people for whom a symphony concert may be a new experience.

Orchestra Place will provide a comfortable "one-stop-shopping" urban atmosphere for concertgoers, students, musicians, DMC employees and workers at nearby businesses, he said.

Construction of the five-story office complex began in August, following the demolition of a former Winkelman's department store on the northwest corner of Woodward Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard. The office building is scheduled to open this November, and an adjoining parking structure in September.

Construction of the high school and the Orchestra Hall expansion will begin within the next two years.

The development is a joint effort between the Detroit Public Schools, the Detroit Symphony Orchestra Hall Board and the Detroit Medical Center, which will lease some of the new office space for its headquarters.

An estimated 400 to 500 DMC employees will work in the new office building, with about 300 of those workers relocated from suburban DMC locations. DSOH will have offices there as well.

The office complex will also have 50,000 square feet on the ground floor for refreshment and retail space. Possibilities include a coffee shop, an art gallery, a DSO store, and a book and music store. A major new restaurant will anchor the ground floor. It is the first office building built on Woodward between Grand Circus Park and Eight Mile in 35 years, Beebe said.

An 800-space parking structure, to be used by office workers and visitors during the day, and concertgoers in the evening, is under construction just west of the new office building.

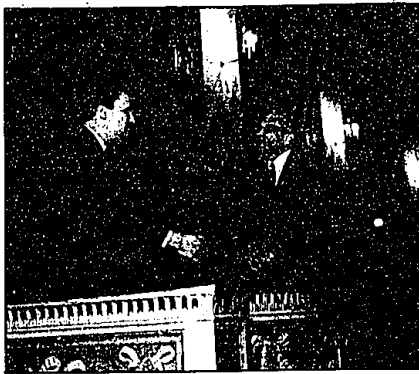
The project, said Cummings and Volpe, could be a catalyst for more development in the Woodward Avenue corridor. "We are part of the fabric of this community," said Volpe, of Grosz Pointe Park.

It could also transform the neighborhood into a southern anchor for Detroit's Cultural Center — the area around Woodward and Warren avenues that includes the art, history, science and African-American history museums, the city's main public library, and Wayne State University.

The new High School for the Fine and Performing Arts will be closely linked to the symphony and will give students a chance to attend lectures and lessons by DSO and visiting musicians. Students from other districts will also have chances to take advantage of some of those offerings.

The school, to be built on 2.5 acres of land west of Orchestra Hall that will be given to the district by the DSOH board, will include an 800-seat auditorium, a print shop, modern telecommunications and computer Internet access, and music and dance rehearsal rooms.

Orchestra Hall expansion, 50,000 square feet, will add a lounge and locker facilities for musicians and a lobby for before-and-after-concert activities. It will be paid for through DSOH fund-raising. The surrounding construction will not change the



STAFF PHOTO BY JIM JACOBSON

Overview: Detroit Symphony Orchestra executive director Mark Volpe (left) and DSOH board vice chairman Peter Cummings discuss Orchestra Place.

interior of Orchestra Hall, widely known for its excellent acoustics. "Halls like this don't get built anymore," Volpe said.

Cummings added that it is significant that the project is not

relying on government grants or subsidies. Doing that, he said, could mean it would get "bogged down in lengthy government appropriations," and, if funded, be built "at someone else's expense."

Artist from page C1

Had Gadya," is currently on display in the Michigan Collectors exhibition continuing through April 13 at the University of Michigan Museum of Art. Created between 1982 and 1984, the print combines the techniques of lithography, linoleum cut and silkscreen with hand coloring and collage.

"Frank Stella's one of the foremost living contemporary masters in the world. I like the style of his work and his colorations," said Jeff Roth.

Daughter Wendy Roth, a graduate senior at the art school, heard Stella's lecture and student critiques last fall and plans to attend the Tuesday evening session as well.

"It was interesting to have someone as famous as him to comment on everybody's work as opposed to a teacher. Even though I'm a graphic artist and he's a fine artist, I gained a lot from his visit," said Leslie Roth.

Although artists and designers throughout the years have visited the School of Art & Design, this is the first season for the

formally organized Visiting Artists and Designers Program. Flyers announcing the series of lectures by Stella, sculptor Ellen Driscoll and former Detroit Institute of Arts curator Jan van der Marck were mailed to alumni and friends of the school living in Bloomfield Hills, Toledo and the Detroit area last fall.

Kuerner, sculpture professor Jon Rush, and painting professors Jim Kogawell and Vince Castagnacci comprise the visual arts committee which scheduled Stella's visit. Castagnacci first had the opportunity to gain in-depth knowledge of Stella's art when the University of Michigan Museum of Art curated a retrospective exhibition of his prints that toured the U.S. from 1982 to 1985.

"Scheduling three visits by the same artist is something new for us. We decided we needed more of a dialogue so he could meet with students, become familiar with their ideas, then come back and address some of the progress," said Vince Castagnacci.

"During the last two visits he gave impressions and advice and talked about his art. It was immensely beneficial. Students were incredibly responsive and appreciative. He's an inspiration, the kind of energy he's brought."

Conversations from page C1

Perhaps OYO's lasting influence will prove that there's an art to building a community, and that it takes a community to build art.

Upcoming concert

On Sunday, March 2, at 2 p.m., the Oakland Youth Orchestra will hold its annual fund-raising concert, "An Afternoon of Renaissance and Romance," at Rochester High School. Tickets: \$10 for adults; \$5 for students and senior citizens. Call (810) 656-8417, or (810) 651-2642 for ticket information.

The program will include the "Introduction to Romeo and Juliet," "Nocturne," from "A Mid-

summer's Night Dream," and "Hobdies Overture," by Mendelssohn.

In addition to the OYO concert a silent auction and fine-food sampling will be held. Joining the festivities will be Jimmy Barrett of WXYT-1270, and special guest Owan Phye and the New World Renaissance Band.

Do you have stories about your arts group, an artist or any arts-related issues? Please contact Frank Provenzano, (810) 901-2557. Or write to him at the Birmingham Eccentric Newspaper, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham, 48009. Frank covers arts for communities in the Eccentric coverage area.

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